[1] THE KINSHIP SYSTEM OF THE NAYARS OF MALABAR

I The Malabar Coast

(1) Physical Features

131 The Malabar Coast lies in the extreme south-west of India, along the shores of the Arabian Sea. The coastline is 360 miles long, the area 14,908 square miles. It is divided off from the rest of South India by the Western Ghats, a mountain wall broken only in the centre of the [167] area by the Palghat Gap. Though periodic immigrations have taken place from the eastern plateau of peninsular India into the coastal region, the mountains prevented close contacts between the people who became established there [177] and their neighbors to the east. On the other hand, its position laid the area open to contacts by sea with many peoples, including Jews and Arabs (1,000 B.C.), Egyptians and Phoenicians (5th century B.C.), Romans (1st century A.D.), Chinese (6th century A.D.), and after 1498 the Portuguese followed by the English, Dutch and French.

133 The coast falls roughly into three natural divisions: the coastal strip, the midlands, and the highlands rising into the Ghats.

[241] The coastal strip is flat and sandy. Its chief product is coconuts, with some rice and bananas. [2] In the southern half of the area it is broken by salt-water lagoons which for over 100 miles form a continuous navigable chain, parallel to 133 the sea. Almost all the chief towns (from north 361 to south, Cannanore, Tellicherry, Mahé,

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[81] 564 The Nayars, unlike the groups so far described, form only a part-society—a named category of castes within the social system of south-[121] west India. An account of their kinship system therefore requires a sketch of the political and economic system in which they were embedded. It seems to have been the Nayars' role as a specialized occupational group within a complex society which accounted for the most unusual features of their kinship institutions.

101 The Nayars differ also from the other groups considered with re-564 gard to their relatively high level of technological development. At 463 least from the first century A.D., Kerala's social structure was based 241 upon plough agriculture with irrigation, specialized crafts, and over-433 seas trade (K. M. Panikkar, 1945: 36). Productivity was sufficiently [439] high so that more than one-quarter of the population could be exempted from manual labor and set apart as specialist, literate groups engaged in religion, government, warfare, and wholesale trade. The [162] Nayars, as the ruling and military castes, formed the core of this aristocracy and probably comprised between one-quarter and one-fifth of the total population.[1]

611 Partly as a result of direct legal changes brought about since the 178 British conquest of 1792, and, more deeply, as a result of the change 177 to an industrial fuel technology, the Nayar system of matrilineal groups has been gradually disintegrating over the past hundred years. Some of the traditional functions of these matrilineal units are being taken over by the elementary family and by the wider, personal, bilateral kindred of each individual. Other former functions of matrilineal groups have passed to such modern bureaucratic institutions as 121 government, army, law court, and school. Because this book is a com-611 parative study of matrilineal systems, I shall concentrate on Nayar lineages and kinship in the "traditional" period before the British

[161] [1] Buchanan estimated the population density of Central Kerala at 100 per square mile in 1800 (1807, II: 501). The density for Cochin State was 814 per square mile in 1931 (Census of India, Cochin State, 1931).

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conquests; that is, from 1342, the date of the first useful Arabic account (Gibb, 1929) to the end of the eighteenth century. My sources include English translations of the writings of Arab, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, and French visitors to Kerala, works by English travelers, government servants, historians, and anthropologists, and a few historical works by Indian scholars who make use of indigenous Malayalam and Sanskrit documents.

Modern changes in Nayar kinship are not evenly distributed throughout the population. Some of the traditional institutions and relationships persist, especially in villages most remote from the seats of government and from modern market centers. Many other traditional usages are remembered by older people. Because of this, my own field work in three villages of Kerala—between November, 1947 and July, 1949—was able to provide me with the organizational framework into which to fit the literary material, and supplied me with many details on the traditional system not hitherto published.[2] Some information was also gleaned from genealogies, manuscript histories of particular lineages, and translations of Malayalam documents relating to land tenure, property transactions, and religious rites.

Modern changes in Nayar kinship comprise a large subject, which I have already briefly treated elsewhere (Gough, 1952*a*; see also Rao, 1957: 74–142). A full account will appear in a forthcoming book.

Ecology

Kerala, or the Malabar Coast, lies in the extreme southwest of India beside the Arabian Sea. The coastline is some 360 miles long, the area about 14,908 square miles. It is divided from the rest of South India by the Western Ghats, a mountain wall broken only in the center by the Palghat Gap. From prehistoric to modern times, migrations took place from the eastern plateau of peninsular India into the coastal region, but until the coming of modern transport the mountains prevented continuous contacts between the people who became established there and their neighbors to the east. On the other hand, its position laid Kerala open to contacts by sea with many peoples, including Jews and Arabs (from perhaps 800 B.C.), Egyptians and Phoenicians (ca. fifth century B.C.), Romans (first century A.D.), Chi-

[2] My field work in three villages of Central and North Kerala was made possible by the grant of a William Wyse Studentship from Trinity College, Cambridge, and of an Anthony Wilkin Studentship from the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. The preparation and writing of these chapters have been carried out with the aid of two grants from the Social Science Research Council, in 1954 and 1956.

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nese (from at least the sixth century) and after 1498 the Portuguese, followed by the English, Dutch, and French (Logan, 1951, I: 251–254, 258, 294–399).

The coast falls roughly into three natural divisions: the coastal strip, the midlands, and the highlands rising into the Ghats (cf. Buchanan, 1807: 565–566). The coastal strip is flat and sandy. Its chief product is coconuts, with some rice and bananas. In the southern half it is broken by salt-water lagoons which for over a hundred miles form a continuous navigable chain parallel to the sea. Most of the chief towns are situated on the coast, divided by chains of little fishing villages. Many of the coast towns are ancient, and most of them lie at the mouths of navigable rivers which flow westward from the Ghats. From time immemorial raw materials, chiefly pepper, were brought by boat from the inland hillsides for shipment from these ports.

The midlands comprise low hills and fertile valleys. Broad strips of alluvial rice lands lie in the valleys, thinning out as the land rises into the foothills of the Ghats. On the hill slopes are gardens of coconut palms, bananas, pepper, ginger, and many fruit trees such as jack and mango. It was probably wild pepper which was exported in Roman times, but pepper and other spices have been deliberately cultivated at least since 1290 (Ricci, 1931: 328). Cashew nuts, introduced by the Portuguese, formed an additional export crop. Small merchant settlements, market-centers, and the military fortifications of petty chiefs existed at strategic points on river banks. Some of these centers grew into bazaar towns in the nineteenth century. But the mass of the population traditionally lived, as today, in scattered village communities on garden land surrounding or surrounded by fields of wet rice, the main subsistence crop. Wet-rice cultivation depended on plough agriculture with teams of oxen or water buffalo. Goats and chickens were the other significant domestic animals.

The highlands rising into the Ghats were covered mainly by deciduous forests. The foothills, interspersed with occasional rice flats, were sparsely populated by people of the same cultural groups as those in the plains. They eked out their wet-rice cultivation with garden crops of fruits, spices, and vegetables, with shifting hoe cultivation of dry grains on hillsides, and with forest hunting of elephant, deer, and pig. Higher in the mountains lived primitive tribes of hunters and shifting cultivators, having only occasional contacts with the kingdoms of the plains.

Throughout most of the area Kerala's rainfall varies between 75 and 170 inches, being heaviest in the north where the mountains are

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dependence of India in 1947. Cochin and Travancore were amalgamated in 1949 and, under popular pressure for the formation of linguistic states, the whole area was reunited as the State of Kerala in 1956. This state elected a Communist government in 1957.

After 1498 there were certain changes in Kerala's economy. Trade and towns expanded, gunpowder was introduced and wars became more devastating, and cash transactions became more prevalent among the aristocratic castes in villages (K. M. Panikkar, 1929: chap. XIV). But the basic form of the caste system and the pyramidal system of kingdoms, subordinate chiefdoms, and villages persisted with little change until after the Mysorean conquest. The Calicut kingdom gradually declined after 1498, for the Portuguese allied themselves with the small kingdom of Cochin to the south, freed it from Calicut's overlordship, and used it as a base from which to expel the Arabs and subdue the Zamorins. Nevertheless, with fluctuating boundaries Calicut remained the most powerful kingdom until the 1730's.

Although its internal political boundaries have shifted continually, Kerala is today still divisible into three major cultural areas. These are distinguished by differences in the names and numbers of the castes who occupy them, in dress, dietetic habits and ritual practices, and in the kinship systems of the several Hindu castes. The northern area, north of the Kora River, comprises the former kingdoms of Nileswaram, Kolattunad, Kottayam, and Kadattunad. This was the area dominated by the Kolattiri kings in the fourteenth century and at various periods thereafter. In British times it became the northern part of Malabar District and the southern part of South Canara District; I shall call it North Kerala. The central area comprises the former kingdoms of Calicut, Walluvanad, Palghat, and Cochin. It was overrun by the Zamorins of Calicut at various times between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. In British times it formed South Malabar District and Cochin State; I shall refer to it as Central Kerala. All the southern area (until recently, Travancore State) was at one time or another subordinate to the kings of Travancore. The political systems—and consequently the internal caste divisions of the Nayars and the forms of their kinship systems—differed in these three areas. Much confusion has arisen in the past because of failure to distinguish between the three regions. It has been assumed that the Nayars had one kinship system, whereas in fact they had three, with different terminological structures. In this paper I describe Nayar kinship in two kingdoms of Central Kerala: Calicut and Cochin.

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European trade shook the foundations of the caste system in other ways. Ports grew larger, and within them European merchants employed Christian converts, artisans, and runaway serfs. Near the ports, serfs sometimes became slaves, being torn from their ancestral lands and sold or hired for cash.

Nevertheless, until the introduction of steam power in the second half of the nineteenth century, the technology and over-all economy of Kerala did not change very radically. Trade was still limited to surplus crops, luxury goods, and metals. Inland villages remained largely self-sufficient, with the lower castes excluded from cash transactions. Upward mobility was virtually confined to Muslims, Christians, and the Hindu aristocrats above the rank of Nayar retainers. It seems to have been this lack of basic change in the technology which allowed the persistence of a strict, hereditary rank order in villages and, within each homogeneous local caste group, of kinship as the main organizing principle.

War and Law

The traditional period was one of perpetual wars between adjacent kingdoms, interrupted only in the rainy seasons. A royal lineage's strength lay in its monopoly of gunpowder, coinage, and customs dues, its ability to use foreign and Muslim ships for naval warfare, and its control of the royal domains both as a source of produce and of Nayar retainers as soldiers. Through its superior wealth and military power a royal lineage could force feudatory princes and vassal nobles to muster soldiers throughout the kingdom in periods of large-scale war. Each district and each village was classified according to the number of Nayar soldiers it could customarily muster for war. In the Zamorin's kingdom the strength of royal feudatories varied between 18,000 and 1,000 Nayars; of Nayar chiefs, between 5,000 and 100; of village headmen, between about 100 and 25 (Ayyar, 1938: 278). Records of the muster of each feudatory were kept by the Nayar clerks of the palace. The primary duty of each chief was to assemble regularly the soldiers of his district for military exercises at the capital, and in time of war to lead them to battle, with the king himself at their head. Within the district military training was organized on a village basis. This might be done by a Nayar village headman, by the chief himself, or, in Brahman villages, by a Nayar military leader (Asan) who acted for the chief or the king. All Nayar boys of the retainer, village headmen, and chiefly and royal

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castes seem to have received a military training, although some, especially of the Agattu Charna caste, later became clerks (Dames, 1921: 18–19; A. Gray, 1887, I: 412–413).

The Nayars' traditional arms were the sword, shield, lance, and the bow and arrow, although gunpowder came into increasing use after the Portuguese arrived. Before 1500 battles were highly stylized (cf. C. A. Menon, 1911: 56; Ayyar, 1938: 118, 171). Not more than 10,000 were commonly brought into the field at one time. Severe loss of life was prevented by the employment of Brahman emissaries who, if fighting became intense, might enter the field and arbitrate between the leaders. If, however, the king or a chief were slain, his personal vassals had to fight to the death or until their honor was avenged by the slaughter of a corresponding leader on the enemy side (Logan, 1951, I: 138).

Later, with the introduction of cannon and fortresses by the Europeans, battles became more frequent and devastating. The Zamorin mustered a total force of between 50,000 and 60,000 at various times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the ruler of Cochin (Ayyar, 1938: 169, 182). The kings had to rely increasingly on paying their soldiers in cash rather than on sporadic feudal levies. Permanent conquest and the control of rich lands also became a more urgent aim of the kings as the overseas trade expanded. But the Nayar techniques of fighting and their code of honor persisted until British times.

Within each kingdom, law was administered at several levels. Each local caste group had its own periodic assembly of household heads to judge crimes (which were also sins) against the caste's religious laws. These included wrongful interdining and sexual relations with members of other castes. The chief punishments were fines for the upkeep of the caste shrine and temporary ostracism. Grave offenders were excommunicated with the consent of the chief. They then became the property of either king or chief and were sold as slaves to foreign traders. In the larger castes such as Tiyyars or Pulayas the local caste group was often contained within the village. The smaller castes of village servants each had their own assemblies extending over a group of adjacent villages.

Among retainer Nayars the local caste group might comprise the Nayars of one caste within one village, within a section of a large village, or within a group of two to four adjacent small villages. This area was called a *tara* in the Calicut kingdom and a *kara* in Cochin; we shall call it a neighborhood. Its assembly was called a *tara-kūttam*

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property groups were held legally responsible for Nayar men only when they committed high treason or when they became engaged in disputes and offenses within the neighborhood of their birth.

It seems probable that the kāranavan's powers over his juniors and over their property were limited by the codification of law which came about during British rule (Aiyar, 1922: 33–132). It is not clear whether he could traditionally alienate land without the consent of other adults of the taravād; during British rule he could not. British law also permitted appeal to the court by junior members for the removal of a kāranavan who could be shown guilty of gross mismanagement. He could then be set aside in favor of his immediate junior. An inefficient kāranavan could moreover be forced by the court to maintain accounts of his income and expenditure. Since 1933 in Malabar District and 1938 in Cochin, all kāranavans have been legally obliged to do this and to make available their accounts for inspection by junior members once a year, as provided in the Madras Marumakkattayam (Matriliny) Act, 1933, and the Cochin Nayar Act, 1938. However, few juniors avail themselves of this right, which is evidently repugnant to the traditional ideals of obedience and trust toward elders of the taravād.

Even traditionally, however, both junior men and women were often consulted in the management of the group's affairs. If a dispute arose between minimal segments of the taravād it was common for appeal to be made to an arbitrator of the caste from outside the lineage. The settlement agreed upon would be embodied in a document called a *kārār*, which legally bound all adult members. In large taravāds the allocation of separate houses and sometimes even of separate land to each segment was usually embodied in a kārār. All land continued to be managed by the kāranavan, but he paid a sum of paddy each year to the senior woman of each household from the land allotted to her segment.

Kārārs were, however, common only in village headmen's, chiefly, and royal property groups. Too little property was usually involved in the case of retainer Nayars, among whom effective daily management was divided between the kāranavan and the oldest woman. As we have seen, the former carried out all formal transactions outside the group, controlled the estate *in toto*, and disciplined men and boys. The latter organized feminine tasks and held more informal authority over women and small children. When the kāranavan was the son or younger brother of the eldest woman, management usually ran particularly smoothly. The oldest woman might indeed be *de facto* head

4: Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AW11 Kerala AW11
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obligations to their children and a strong affective bond with them. The *Karanavān* of their lineage segment was however the authority in important matters.

Both in Kottayam and in Cochin, Nāyar women were occasionally married to men of the highest, patrilineal caste of Nambūdiri Brahmans. Children of such unions were Nāyars, and rules of ritual pollution maintained distance between them and their higher caste fathers. The Nambūdiri father might not eat with his wife and children, and might not touch them during the daytime while in a state of ritual purity. Only the eldest son of a Nambūdiri house might marry a Nambūdiri wife and beget children for his own family.

British rule brought about the collapse of the Nāyar armies early in the nineteenth century. Probably as a result of this change, plural marriages gradually died out in Cochin. The lineage system persisted with little change until the turn of the century, but in both areas the employment of men in professional and wage work led to the development of privately owned property in addition to property owned jointly by the matrilineal group. The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 permitted men to register their marriages and gave the children of such marriages rights in half the personal property of the father after his death. During this century, the greatly increased employment of men in salaried work, and the development of cash-crop farming, have brought about a partial disintegration of the matrilineage, and have tended toward the emergence of the elementary family as an economic and legal unit. Under the pressure of these changes, laws[3] were passed in 1933 and 1937 which required all men to register their marriages, gave rights of maintenance to their wives and children, and provided that the whole of a man's personal property be inherited by his wife and children. In addition, the laws permitted, though they did not require, equal division of the matrilineal estate on a per caput basis[4] between all members. Although some traditional households remain, it has now become fairly customary for a woman and her immature children jointly to separate their shares of property from those of the rest of their matrilineal group, and to set up a new establishment with the woman's husband. He, in turn, may have abstracted his single share of property from that of his own matrilineal group. Sometimes, the husband himself provides a new house for his elementary family from his own share of property and his private earnings. Sometimes the new house is provided from the property of the wife and children, who receive their husband and father into it as a resident and wage earner. Sometimes husband and wife pool their property and set up a joint establishment.

Given the modern heterogeneity of legal, economic, and residential arrangements, and given also variations in education, interests, and life experience, it is not surprising that cults of the dead reveal differential rates of change. I shall be chiefly concerned with the traditional cults, although these persist without change in only a few of the more traditionally patterned households—actually, in fifteen percent of Nāyar households in one Cochin village, and in thirteen percent in one village in Kottayam.

The Nāyars participate in three distinguishable categories of cults of the dead. The first comprises a collective cult, by the matrilineal property group, of the ghosts of matrilineal forebears, which I call lineage ghosts. This cult is non-Sanskritic. The second category comprises various kinds of offerings by individuals to the spirits of dead kinsfolk at funerals or on the anniversaries of deaths. These cults are Sanskritic in origin. The third category comprises various cults of the ghosts of persons who were not members of the Nāyar's own lineage; I call these alien ghosts. These cults,

4:Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWll Kerala AWll
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was still undivided commented to me on this change. "In my *taravād*," he said, "I dare not speak before the *kāranavan* without standing and placing my hand before my mouth. But in K. *taravād*, after their partition, I have seen the nephews sitting to play cards with their uncle and passing the cigarette from their mouth to his. When I saw this I knew that relationship means property, and without property there is no relationship."

Moreover, the change to elementary family households does not merely entail a shift of the same disciplinary functions from the mother's brother to the father. Nāyar fathers have a tradition of indulgent tenderness toward their children and are loth to discipline them. Even when they are forced to do so, the techniques of discipline differ from those in a traditional *taravād* house. In the intimate atmosphere of the small elementary family household, traditional etiquette is abandoned. Children learn to obey both parents from love more than from fear. There appears to be a much deeper repression of aggression than in the traditional setting, and correspondingly, many young Nāyars cannot entertain the notion that their parents' ghosts could act punitively toward them. It seems probable that such changes in the modes of handling aggression—affected also by the collapse of the military tradition and the modern legal ban on all forms of physical aggression—may also lie behind the repugnance of modern Nāyars for such other traditional religious forms as blood sacrifice and spirit possession.

Also important in the abandonment of ghost cults is, however, an increased tendency toward the adoption of Sanskrit rites. This tendency, which has marked all the non-Brahman castes during the past hundred years or so, I would associate with increasing mobility within the caste system and, most recently, with its gradual collapse. For the Nāyars, as for the lower castes, the Brahmans are no longer a group with whom they have fixed status relationships. Instead, the Brahmans are now a reference group whom the Nāyars emulate and with whom they compete in the struggle for high rank and respectability. Some Nāyars who still hold their traditional beliefs in ancestral spirits and deities deliberately "purge" their rites of non-Sanskritic elements in order to gain respectability. Others have changed both rites and beliefs toward a modified form of the Brahmanical religion, even while they are busy repudiating the religious authority of the Brahman. Yet others, whose number is probably increasing, repudiate both Brahmanical and non-Sanskritic religions in their orthodox forms. Instead, they work out for themselves a more or less agnostic world view with humanitarian ideals, in which ceremonies, if they figure at all, figure only as acts of piety toward respected persons.

The cults of alien ghosts are also changing their form and gradually dying out. This change accompanies the gradual collapse of the caste system as a system of ranked occupational groups linked by hereditary service ties. The collapse of the caste system itself results from the growth of the capitalist market economy and the democratization of political institutions. Some Nāyars retain their beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery, but the categories of persons whom they suspect are no longer solely caste determined. They are as likely to include fellow factory workers or competitors in government service, irrespective of caste. Professional exorcists of appropriate caste are often no longer available, for many have left their traditional work. So also have many of the low caste families who formerly propitiated ghosts and minor deities associated with village temples or with Nāyar *taravāds*. Since the passing of the Temple Entry

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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302 564* [412] [177]

Nâyar women of all classes shave the hair about the vagina. They shave themselves, standing, placing one foot on a bench or anything a couple of feet or so from the ground, thus raising the leg. The use of scissors for this purpose is rare, new fangled and not sanctified by custom. In a few houses now-a-days razors of English or German manufacture are kept for the use of the women; but according to general custom the barber woman pays periodical visits, and the women of the house receive from her a razor, with which they shave themselves. The armpits, the eyebrows and stray hairs on any other part of the body, excepting of course the head, are shaved by the barber woman. I have it an excellent authority that some of the elderly women—possibly those who are old and fleshy—submit their entire person to the barber woman's razor. The young women never. [305]

In the Tamil country the women, as is well known, use a depilatory. Possibly the Nâyar women resort to shaving in order to avoid the unpleasant odour of the depilatory. The reason for shaving or destroying the hair on that part of the body is not apparent. No reason is assigned for it. Very likely the custom arose out of necessities for cleanliness, when the Nâyars were not the clean people they are now, and like all customs has persisted aimlessly.

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Colour of the skin.—Using Broca's colour tables. The darkest was as No. 43 (one only); the fairest, 44 to 30. Two others were fair or very nearly so. The colour number for 5 was 37; for 5 was 28; for 13 was 29, and lighter. Darker than the Nambûtiri. The women, who are not so much exposed to the sun, are distinctly fair as well as well favoured. Many are very handsome.

Colour of the eyes.—Out of 20 individuals (using Broca's colour tables for the eyes), in 13 the number corresponding to their eyes was 2, while in 7 it was 1 to a little lighter. So that the eye is, as a rule, brown; rarely black.

301 564* [304]

Ornaments, men.—Not much jewellery is worn. One or two golden earrings called kadukkans are worn, as a rule, in each ear by those who can afford to do so. Some of the members of this clan who call themselves "Padi-nâyirattil"—"one of 10,000"—doubtless a relic of the old Nâyar military system, pierce the ears, but never wear earrings. The title of the hereditary chief of these is Ayyâyira Prabhu Karttâvu. The 10,000 do not, however, all belong to this clan. I came across a man of the Nambiyâr clan who belonged to it, and he too could not wear earrings. Rings and amulets are also worn commonly.

One individual wore 2 golden earrings, of the pattern called kadukkan in each ear.

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One individual wore two rings made of an amalgam of gold and copper, called "tambâk" in the vernacular, on the ring finger of the right hand, for good luck. "Tambâk" rings are lucky rings. It is a good thing to

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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wash the face with the hand on which is a "tambâk" ring. I see in my notes a record of an individual who wore one of these rings on the second finger of the left hand. They are common.

One individual wore two rings of the pattern called triloham (lit: metals) on the ring finger of each hand. Each of these rings was made during an eclipse!

One individual wore a silver bangle as a vow. It was to be given up at the next festival to be held at a place called Kottiôre, a famous festival in North Malabar, the scene of it being far away in the forest under the hills. He also wore a "tambâk" ring on the ring finger of the right hand for luck; and a thin iron ring on the ring finger of the left hand.

One individual wore no jewellery, but there was a small circular tattooed spot in the centre of the forehead over the glabella. Tattooing is not common. This individual is the only one of those examined who was tattooed.

Women.—The style of the jewellery worn by the women will be seen in the *plate.*[1] It is altogether unlike any other South Indian jewellery. The necklaces are almost identical in form, shape and general character with those of Sindh. Silver is never worn.

The lobes of the ears are dilated in childhood generally in the sixth month and in them are worn large spiral rings of white metal or the more solid "tôda," really a handsome ornament, in the groove of which the elongated ear-lobe is almost concealed. It is made of gold. Properly speaking the tôda is an ornament worn exclusively by the Nâyar women. Several necklaces are often worn at the same time. The Venetian sequin, which probably first found its way hither in the days of Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque, is one of those coins which, having found favour with a people, is used persistently in ornamentation long after it has passed out of currency; thus illustrating the well-known thesis that things originally made for use, by and by pass into ornament. There are instances of this use of coins in Europe, of course, as amongst the Swabian peasantry. So fond are the Malayalis—those of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore—of the sequin that to this day there is quite a large trade in imitations of the coin for purposes of ornament. Such is the persistence of its use that the trade extends to brass and even copper imitations of the sequin. The former, brought from Europe, are often seen to bear the

[1] [see plate I, facing p. 220 -- An.]

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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legend "made in Austria." The Nâyars wear none but the gold, "mounted" as they call it (the mounting being much as the upper portion of one section of the necklace, in the plate), strung together through the mounting just as the necklace: a very effective ornament for the neck. The brass imitations of the sequin are worn by the women of the inferior races of whom we shall have some description hereafter. If one asks the ordinary Malayali, say a Nâyar, what persons are represented on the sequin, one gets for answer that they are Rama and Sita; between them a cocoanut tree!

Turkish coins, French half louis, and German 10 mark pieces are also used in the same way, each one being known by a distinctive vernacular name, and no corruption of its nomenclature in European coinage, so that it is always easy to identify one of these coins by its vernacular name. For instance, every Malayali knows what an "Amâda" is: it is what we know to be a real or imitation Venetian sequin.* The half louis of the empire is known as the "pakshikkas," probably from the eagle on the reverse. And so on.†

Ornaments are never worn on the ankles or on the waist, as is the rule in other parts of Southern India.

Dress, men.—This is very simple; ordinarily one cloth round the loins, the ends overlapping a foot or two in front. It is not tucked between the legs, which is the fashion practically all over India, but hangs straight to the ground. It should touch the ground, or very nearly do so. Wearing a cloth in such fashion carries with it dignity to the wearer. A Tîyan, or a man of any inferior

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* I have never heard any explanation of the word Amâda in Malabar. The following comes from Tinnevelly: "Amâda was the consort of Bhagavati and he suddenly appeared one day before a Shânâr (the caste devoted to climbing the palms and drawing off the juice) and demanded food. The Shânâr said he was a poor man with nothing to offer but toddy, which however he gave in a palmyra leaf. Amâda drank the toddy and performing a mantram over the leaf it turned into gold coins which bore on one side the pictures of Amâda, the Shânâr and the tree; and these he gave the Shânâr on a reward for his willingness to assist him. This explains the two names—Shânâr caste (as they are called in Tinnevelly, but where they are not very common), and Amâda."

† It is scarcely right to say any of these coins, even the sequin, is not current. The value of each is known everywhere to a nicety. It must be remembered that throughout Malabar copper coins of the English and Dutch East India Companies, of Mysore, and of almost every former dynasty of South India are to be found amongst the coins actually current with the people, while in the rural parts reckoning is always in fanams: not in annas.

*141 564 In four the nasal point was somewhat elevated. Slight prognathism with projecting teeth was observed in one individual, an unhealthy person.

Figure.—Seventy-one per cent. of the subjects were noted as "slight," 29 per cent. as "medium" and of those but two individuals are put down as "sturdily built."

*142 564 *Hair.*—In three individuals hairiness was conspicuously apparent, there being hair nearly all over the body, and in one of these the hair in the small of the back was so thick that in my notes it is described as "like a bush."

On the head.—In nearly 80 per cent. of the subjects the hair on the head was "plentiful and wavy"; in a few of these it was "very thick," while in the remaining 20 per cent. it was "moderate." In no case was it noted as "thin" or "slight." The number of subjects in which growth of hair on the cheeks was noted was one-fifth of the whole.

On the chest.—In nearly a quarter, the hair on the chest was noted as "thick."

On the arms.—In most cases it varied from "very slight" to "moderate." Rarely "thick."

On the legs.—In nearly half it was "moderately thick" to "thick"; in the remainder, slight to moderate.

Colour of the skin.—It should have been noticed before that the colour of the face of the ordinary Malayali is invariably lighter than that of the body; possibly from the prevailing custom of using the umbrella. Malabar is for the most part shaded by trees and palms, and its peoples have not that disregard for the sun's javelins which we see in the country to the eastward. No one [293] starts on a journey, and rarely leaves his house, without [177] his umbrella—the thing of cadjan now being by degrees replaced by the cheap umbrella of European manufacture. The labourer working in the field, the fisherman 292 in his boat on the sea, the boat-man on the backwater, 751 all wear a large umbrella-like hat. Women always carry an umbrella out of doors; or, as in North Malabar, an umbrella hat-like thing which seems to be a curious survival of the custom of wearing an umbrella hat, is carried. This is, apparently, an ordinary umbrella hat, but the central part, which appears to be made to fit the head, as in the ordinary umbrella hat, is too small by half to fit any head, and this hat-like umbrella is carried in the hand to shield the head from the sun and the face

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themselves by bathing in the temple tank, come to the *Darsana* (the aspect towards which the face of the image looks). There the priest brings the offering and the male member from either the father's family or the mother's own family takes a little of it on his pointing finger and gives it to the child. The child is supposed to inherit the qualities of the person who gives it the sacred rice, an idea allied to the superstition concerning godfather and godchild. There is, of course, a feast on the day at the child's house.

"Chaque société générale," says M. Van Gennep, "peut être considéré comme une sorte de maison devisée en chambres et en couloirs. . . . Chez les demi-civilisés ces compartiments sonts soigneusement isolés les unes des autres et pour passer de l'un à l'autre des formalités et des cérémonies sont nécessaires." This idea that in semi-civilised societies stages of life are marked out with great precision so that the passage from one to another necessitates ceremonies or "rites de passage" is applicable only in a very limited sense in the case of the Nāyars. Among them such ceremonies are few and very far between. The male children, after the *Churu Koda*, or the rice-giving ceremony just now described, have only one other ceremony to perform which is called *Sasty-Purty*, or the fullness of sixty years. Between his sixth month and his sixtieth year a male member of the Nāyar Society has no *rites de passage* to pass through. The *Sasty-Purty*, which takes place on his sixtieth birthday, is a sort of jubilee, after which respectable people are supposed to retire from worldly life. It is indeed a *rite de passage*.

Women have naturally more ceremonies than men. Apart from the *Talikettu* (described in the last chapter) a Nāyar woman has to pass through the ceremonies of *Terunda Kuli* (bathing after the first menses) and *Pulicudi* described above. After she has become a mother a woman can be said to be free from all ceremonies till her sixtieth year, when, after a *Sasty-Purty*, she also retires from active life.

The Nāyar funeral ceremonies are of a very complex nature. They show a great deal of Hindu ideas about soul and re-birth mixed with purely Nāyar beliefs about *Pretams*, ghosts, etc., etc. It is important, in this connection, to notice at the very start that the Nāyars make a clear distinction between the ceremonies performed at the death of the eldest member of the family and those at the death of others. The following is the procedure generally adopted at the death of a Nāyar. As soon as a person dies he is bathed and clad in white, and laid on a bed made of long plantain leaves. If it is the eldest male or female member of the family that is dead, then all their relations on the matrilineal side present new cotton cloths, with which the corpse is covered and tied before it is taken to be burnt. Only the eldest members are burnt; others are buried. Apart from the greater importance attached to the death of the eldest members, the ordinary funeral rites are in essentials the same.

The presence of the *Mārān* (a particular caste among the Nāyars who perform the lesser priestly functions) is absolutely necessary on the occasion. He is sent for as

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with all kind of sports.[1] The family, which is supposed to have been in mourning during the whole period, goes back to its normal life.

M. Van Gennep considers the state of mourning as "Un état de marge pour les survivants, dans lequel ils entrent des rites de séparation, et d'où ils sortent par des rites de réintegration dans la société général (rites de levée du deuil)."[2] With regard to the first fourteen days in particular, a Nāyar family in mourning constitutes a special society. During this period, and to a certain extent to the period till the final rites (forty-one days, or one year) social life is suspended. The ceremony at the end of the year is then a *rite de réintegration*.

VI.—RELIGION AND MAGIC AMONG THE NĀYARS.

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The religious beliefs of the Nāyars show an extraordinary mixture of Hindu and Dravidian cults. All the temples are dedicated to Krishna, Siva, or Kartyayani. There are also a few *kavus*, or groves, for the worship of the lesser Hindu deities. But the important point with regard to this is that the Nāyars are, as a whole, a people almost without a religion,[3] and they use Hindu temples for practices which receive no sanction even in the generous vagueness of that creed. The religious conceptions of Hinduism have but the slightest influence on the Nāyar community as a whole. It is quite true that there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but the very fact that the distinction of Saiva-ism, Sakti-ism, Vaishnava-ism, etc., have not reached them, is sufficient proof that, though they have been Hinduised in form and have belonged to the Hindu fold, their primitive beliefs have survived to a great extent.

Nothing shows so much the extreme persistence of primitive culture, even in the face of higher civilising agencies, than the wide and almost universal acceptance of spirit-worship, and the almost entire absence of religious life among the Nāyars after at least twenty centuries of contact with Hinduism. Their contact with religions has not been limited indeed to Hinduism. The Jews, flying after the destruction of their Temple, found refuge among the Nāyars, and have lived in their midst for nigh two thousand years. The Apostle St. Thomas is supposed to have planted a community of Syrian Christians among them, who also have lived side by side with the Nāyars as their social inferiors in Malabar for almost the same length of time. Ever since Mohamed founded his religion in Arabia, Allah has found faithful worshippers in Malabar who moved with equal status among the Nāyar population. The beautiful creed of Gautama Buddha had for long its devout votaries in the land of the Nāyars, and traces of Buddhist monasteries and survivals of Buddhist worship still

[1] There is a story about a poet who enjoyed this celebration very much and said to the master of the house, "I hope there will be one like this here every year."

[2] *Rites de Passage*, p. 211.

[3] See the discussion following.

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abound. The militant Romanism of the Holy Inquisition, and the no less militant Protestantism of the Dutch, had their chance, in turn, for at least a century and a half. Yet, with all the great religions of the world to choose between during the last two thousand years, it is nothing short of marvellous to see the Nāyars, who have, it must be remembered, assimilated a very great deal of the material and intellectual culture of their neighbours, and, more than that, excelled them in literature and music, still maintain with undiminished vigour their spirit-worship, black-magic, and demoniacal ceremonies, and are devoid of almost every element of true religious life.

We may be accused of the narrow use of a wide word in the phraseology of Tylor when we deny that the Nāyars have any religion apart from a veneer of Hindu influence. Their beliefs are mainly magical. Here, of course, I am treading on very dangerous ground, dangerous even to the initiated, but fatal to the novice. In this essay I have taken the distinction between religion and magic as being primarily a question of method rather than of intention or possible effect. The orthodox French opinion that the difference between magic and religion is that the latter is social while the former is anti-social, has been proved by Mr. E. S. Hartland and Dr. Marett to be wholly untenable; while the contention of Dr. Marett himself[1] is that the difference between magic and religion lies in the attitude of society towards them.[2]

Among the Nāyars there is an implicit distinction between practices to propitiate a god and those with which to bully a spirit. Bullying a spirit for purposes of social benefit I have not considered to be religion, though it is recognised by society as beneficial and therefore according to Dr. Marett should be considered as religious—because it does not possess the emotional and the psychological elements which

[1] *Anthropology*, p. 210 (Home Univ. Series).

[2] Dr. Marett has recently expressed his view thus:—

"The dominant social tradition tolerates in a community only certain practices and the beliefs associated with them. These may be said to constitute the religion of the community. It does not matter whether they embody customs such as sacrifice and prayer which are essential to the civilised man's notion of *his* religion, or whether they involve processes of sympathetic magic, etc., such as have for us become disreputable.

"On the other hand, when resort is had to the supernaturalistic means in order to gain selfish and anti-social ends we may speak of magic." (Class Lecture on Primitive Morals.)

Here Dr. Marett seems to go back to the French view and hold that the difference between magic and religion is that the former is selfish and anti-social while the latter is disinterested and social. The view here submitted is different. It is submitted that primitive society understands the difference between magical and religious customs even when both are essentially social and disinterested. To the primitive mind, the difference between religion and magic lies in the method and procedure of the ceremonies, or, as we shall now call them, the ritual. As method and procedure only reflect the mental state of the performer and the society to the benefit of which these ceremonies are performed, this difference is essentially psychological. This position is better explained by the Nāyar customs and beliefs noted below.

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rhyme, and I must say that I never knew anyone who took an oil bath on a Thursday, except people who take it every day.

The tabus extend to the way in which you sleep. You are not supposed to sleep with your body north to south or west to east. The reason, I believe, is that the spirits of the dead are supposed to live in the south and in the east, and if you lie with your head facing them you might become possessed of them.

There are certain days of the lunar month on which no one may start on a journey :

Yama Rudrāki Muppōram
Trikēta iva ēzhu Naal
Vitaikil vilaiyā Bhūmi
Pākwanakil aran uri.

On the seven days presided over by the seven stars thus enumerated, if a land is sowed no seed will sprout, if anyone starts on a journey he will not return.

I remember a curious story connected with this. Some four months before leaving for England I had to see the Inspector of Schools in Travancore to get my Leaving Certificate. The only day available for me was one of these tabu days, and in spite of the protests of everybody else in the house, I set out on my business. When I reached the capital of the state the Inspector of Schools had left on circuit an hour before to the place where I started from. I followed him there, but when I arrived he had left the place, and, as a result of continuous journeying and bad food, I was laid up in bed through a physical breakdown. It was true that if I had not started on that tabu day, but had had the patience to wait for another twenty-four hours the Inspector of Schools would have come to the town where I was living ; it was also true that I came back very ill. Everyone, therefore, took it for granted that all this ill-luck was due to my starting on a bad day. Many are the stories that are told of people suffering great misfortunes due to starting on these bad days, and there is, as M. Reinach would say, " a vast oral tradition of leading cases " connected with it. I daresay my case will go down as a most authentic one, as the facts are undoubtedly true ; only the explanation is doubtful.

Tabus like this can be mentioned without end ; but it is useless to do so, as they all seem to have the same " rationale " : that is, you will break your peace with the world of demons and ghosts that surround you and bring down upon yourself their wrath if you break any one of these rules. Tabu among the Nāyars is essentially an arrangement to keep the ghosts and spirits pacified : for it is clear to them from the tested experience of past ages that to break any of these rules is to challenge those who have power to do them great harm

In whatever is said here, it should be understood that I have tried to eliminate from the Nāyar beliefs those elements which are indubitably Hindu. As I have pointed out at the start, there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but it is an interesting fact that the practices and beliefs above described are pre-

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valent among them also. The more one looks into these matters the more one becomes clear that in the unorganised and uneducated human mind, be it "civilised" or be it primitive, there is a horizontal stratification of the most contradictory ideas, which lie absolutely undisturbed in the ordinary course of life. In the mind of the ordinary man whose *forte* is not clear thinking, a great deal of intermingling of such ideas might take place. It is no uncommon sight to see a thoroughly Hindu-ised Nāyar who talks about Absolutism and Illusion, and believes in them, paying a *Kāniyān* to get the devil out of his little niece. This is, perhaps, the truth which lies midway between those who assert, like Dr. Frazer, that magic and religion are hostile and cannot be reconciled, and those who, like Dr. Marett, hold that in their origin they are the same, that it is in their character as looked upon by society they differ. The view I have maintained here is that religion and magic are different in their psychological and emotional effects and that Dr. Frazer is right when he says that they are at bottom hostile. But the almost universal coexistence of magic and religion is due to the attitude of society which tolerates all contradictions and insists only on their effect being for social welfare.

VII.—THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE NĀYARS.

Occupation.—The Nāyars are at present an essentially agricultural population. The vast majority of them are peasant proprietors owning small farms. Rice and coco-nuts are the chief things cultivated, though in North Malabar pepper and cardoman have also their share.

With regard to these matters the Nāyars have attained a certain stage of excellence. Their coco-nut estates are planted with a considerable amount of scientific skill and they are proficient in the industries which are allied to coco-nut cultivation; such as coir-matting, copra making and extraction of coco-nut oil. The extreme fertility of the land has made agricutural chemistry, as far as coco-nut and rice cultivation are concerned, a matter of secondary importance; and even to-day there are very few Nāyars who have studied the Western methods of agriculture.

As each Nāyar family generally lives in a compound of its own, coco-nut cultivation is generally in small farms. Extensive coco-nut plantations owned by the same man are very few. The position is much like that in England before the Enclosures. Even if all the land in a particular area is owned by the same person it is seldom enclosed and transformed into one large estate. On the other hand, they continue to be regarded as separate compounds and the houses on them are generally occupied either by Nāyar tenants or by Pulaya slaves.

The fact that Nāyar families live in garden houses is one of great significance. Horticulture is practised with great interest in all families, rich as well as poor. It is, in fact, very seldom that any Nāyar family uses vegetables bought from the market.

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CHAPTER I.

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THE SUDRAS OF COCHIN.

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A. THE HIGH CASTE SUDRAS (NAYARS).

Introduction.

THE NAYARS are an interesting caste of people, forming a considerable portion of the population of the Cochin State; they constitute the third and last of the honoured castes under the name of the pure "*Sudras of Malayala*". They were mostly nobles who engaged neither in handicraft, nor in commerce, nor in any other occupation but that of arms, which they always carried; and no one could be called a Nayar who was not of noble lineage. They were in fact the magnates of the rulers of Kerala, and exercised as much authority over their inferiors as their rulers did over them. They formed in ancient times a warlike race with military leaders and civil administrators of all kinds. Very much influenced as they are by modern civilisation, their customs widely differ from those of other people, in marriage, family and social organizations, as also in maternal filiation. These customs, which are primitive, are being tenaciously retained by them; and they are even now, as they have always been, a unique people whose customs may appear peculiarly strange to foreigners.

The word *Nayar*, which is the honourific plural of *Nayan*, is derived from *Nayaka*, which means a leader of the people; and the name, which in the widest sense at present includes a large number of sub-castes quite distinct from one another, may have been given by a class of Brahmans called the Nambuthiris [1] to the Nayars proper, who formed a military class in ancient times. Some consider it to be more correct to derive *Nayars* from *Nagas* (snakes or snake-worshipping Nagas or Scythians) from the worship of the Nagas or snakes which has been the characteristic cult of the community.

1. See account of the Nambuthiris.

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Thus did the Nayars as a warlike race play a very important part in the history of *Kerala* during the middle ages. Their weapons and modes of fighting thereafter underwent many changes under the influence of the Portuguese and the Dutch, who introduced western arms and tactics into the then existing art of war, when also the Nayars proved equal to the occasion. Labourdanais, who distinguished himself in the storming of the little town of Mahe, bore the brunt of many a Nayar onslaught, and had therefore opportunities of forming a just estimate of their work. Major Munro, who was instrumental in the storming of that little town in 1761, met the Nayar troops in the field, and thus described their mode of fighting: "One may as well look for the needle in a bottle of hay as any of them in the day-time, they lurking behind the sand-banks and bushes, except when we are marching towards the fort, when they appear like bees out in the month of June besides which they point their guns well and fire them also." Dr. Buchanan, who under the orders of Lord Wellesley journeyed through Mysore, Malabar and Canara, spoke of them in the same strain. When Hyder Ali invaded Malabar, they committed terrible havoc on the Mysoreans. "The Nayars are the military class of Malabar," writes Col. Wilkes, who was struck with their pluck and agility. "They are perhaps not exceeded by any nation on earth in their high spirit of independence, but like all persons stimulated by that spirit without the direction of discipline, their efforts are uncertain, capricious and desultory." The last event in which they showed their military valour was in the rebellion of the Pychee Raja of Kurumbranad. With the fall of the Portuguese and the Dutch, and the conquest and annexation of Malabar by the English East India Company, the Nayars have almost lost their warlike characteristics, through successive generations of peace and have now become attached to the land. Even writing in 1855, Captain Drury contrasts the Nayar's effeminate disposition with the martial valour of his forefathers. He does not bear transplantation. He now prefers a quiet swing in the verandah or a lounge under a tree, chewing betel. Unlike his ancestor, he is becoming more and more domesticated. The Nayar population has greatly increased and a large majority of them are not very affluent; and among these physical deterioration is noticeable.

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partly guided by the influence of the monsoon. In regard to the serpent grove or religious shrine, a square plot just in the middle of the south-west portion is considered the most auspicious. A typical Nayar house is quadrangular, with an open space *(mittam)* in the centre; the western portion of it is the granary, while the rest of it is partitioned into rooms. The northern portion comprises the store-room and the kitchen at the western and the eastern extremities, with the dining room in the middle, while the western and eastern portions are kept as open halls for gatherings on important occasions. The house so constructed must face the rising sun—the east—and yet rather inconsistently it is called the *patinjattupura* or the western roof or building. The reason of this is that the *patinjattu muri*—the central chamber or the honoured guest chamber in the house, sanctuary of the ancestors of its occupants—must be so placed as to admit of entrance through its doorway the sun's earliest rays. Behind one or more of the rooms above mentioned is a *chaippu* forming a kind of enclosed verandah room. Another type most commonly met with consists of a portico serving as a reception-hall, the other portions of the building corresponding in details, more or less, with the quadrangular edifice just described. The rigid adherence to the science of architecture is confined not only to the Nayars and other high caste-men, but also to the generality of the Native Christians and Mahomedans who, before construction, always consult some expert in the choice of a proper site and the formation of a ground plan of the house. Misfortunes or even calamities are often attributed to the violation of these principles, and very often a newly built house is either altered to remedy the defects or even pulled down. There are again houses, where the two types are combined. The huts of the poor classes consist generally of one or two small, dark and ill-ventilated rooms with a kitchen at one end, and a verandah either in front or on all sides of the main building. With the increase of population, and with the demand for more houses, the old notions and *sastraic* injunctions are being overlooked as a matter of necessity, and the old fashioned houses are displaced by those erected on sound sanitary principles. The wood-work of the buildings is solid and substantial, and is in some cases beautifully carved. The walls are generally of laterite, brick or mud, and roofs which till

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342 recently were thatched are now being tiled with tiles of European pattern manufactured either locally or in Mangalore.
342 In these days of comparative peace and security of life and
178 property from marauders and free-booters, the necessity for massive structures has ceased to exist, and, coupled with this, the improved notions of architecture, derived from an easy intercourse with more civilised centres, the rapid progress of education, and with it a better knowledge of, and regard for, sanitation and hygiene, have wrought remarkable changes in the construction of buildings, so that a better class of houses, well built, airy, and commodious, is displacing the old ones with their small, dark and ill-ventilated rooms.

351 As part of the surroundings of the dwellings in the same
[343] compound, there are frequently seen a cattle shed, an excavated
[312] tank for bathing purposes, often full of fish and water lilies, a
[515] well so arranged as to admit of water being drawn directly from it to the kitchen, an out-house *(matam)* for the Brahman
[574] travellers or visitors, and, lastly, a small edifice for the family
[343] deity. The gardens surrounding the houses are adorned with mango and jack trees, immense bananas, groves of cocoanut
[245] and areca palms and various kinds of flowers. Thus, in most places, their houses, which are occupied by fine types of humanity, (well made men and shapely women), are situated beneath the grateful shade of magnificent avenues of trees.

356 Four hundred years ago, a Portuguese traveller, writing
[175] on the subject, remarks upon the Nayar houses as being scrupulously clean and neat. Without any exaggeration it may be said that they are proverbially so, and the women are either naturally endowed with a taste, or are trained from early child-
352 hood, to keep the houses and everything therein neat and clean.
[356] Those of the richer and middle classes are in these days fur-
[177] nished with articles of European manufacture, and all their domestic utensils, for daily use, are made either of bell-metal, copper or brass, all well cleaned and washed early every morning.

415 The furniture of the poorer classes is very simple; a metal
352 pot with a spout, a few metal plates and saucers, a few metal
412 pans of different sizes, a spitoon of brass, a few mats, a knife,
184 a cot or two, a betel box, and a few wooden bins for grains, are nearly all the requirements of a household in this respect.

342 The house itself is called by several names according to
564 the occupant's caste, that of an ordinary Nayar being a *veedu*

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The Brahmanical explanation, though palpably inadequate, is, that marriage is a sort of sacrement of which every maiden must partake in order that she may cleanse her own being from the taint of original sin, accomplish the salvation of her father and her ancestors, and bring forth a son to carry on the domestic worship (*Sacra privata*) of her husband's family. The Brahmans who observed this either imposed this principle on the Nayars, or the Nayars borrowed it from them in the belief that it would lead to social distinction.

Looking on this form of marriage in use, they are not regarded as constituting a religious ceremony or a *samskára* or sacrement in the Hindu or European sense of the word. "There is no officiating priest in attendance, there is no formula to be repeated, there is no *vedic*, *puranic* or religious chant or exhortation, and there is no formal benediction. The essential elements of a Brahmanical marriage, *viz.*, taking the bride by the hand or *Pánigrahanam*, the walking of seven steps or *Saptapati*, and the *hómam* or sacrifice to the fire, are not to be found among its details. Therefore the marriage customs among *marumakkathâyam* Hindus have no connection with their religious observances such as exists under ordinary Hindu law though several of the details bear a resemblance to a portion of the marriage ritual of the Nambutiris." [1]

Puberty customs (Thirandukuli).

The *Thirandukuli* is a celebration when a girl reaches the age of maturity. When a girl comes of age, she is lodged in a separate room where a lamp is lit and a brass pot with a bunch of cocoanut flowers is kept. She has to keep with her a circular plate of brass with a handle, called *vâlkannâti*, literally a looking glass with a handle. The event is proclaimed by a *Kurava* (shouts of joy by women). The women of the neighbouring families, and those of friends and relations visit her, and some of them make presents of cloths. On the third day, the villagers, friends and relatives are treated to a luncheon of rice and milk pudding. Early in the morning of the fourth day, the Mannáns or Vélans (washermen) appear. The girl is anointed with oil, and the tender leaves of the cocoanut palm are tied round the head and loins. In the company of maidens she leaves the room and the Vélans entertain the party, who soon move on in procession to a neighbouring tank where she wears the cloth washed by a washerman. Then

1. Malabar Marriage Commission Report, page 87.

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like other conventionalities, is an accident, and the Nayar women are as chaste and faithful as their neighbours, just as they are as modest as their neighbours, although their national costume does not include some of the details required by conventional notions of modesty."[1] Nevertheless, the existing state of things in the community does not quite satisfy the sentiments of the educated public. There was a loud cry for reform and legislation in British Malabar. The Madras Government appointed a commission, which, after its protracted labours, enacted a permissive law, Act IV of 1896. The main provisions of the Bill are, that, when a *sambandham* has been registered, it shall have the incidence of a legal marriage; that is to say, the wife and children shall be entitled to maintenance by the husband or father respectively and to succeed to half his self-acquired property if he dies intestate, while the parties to such a *sambandham* cannot register a second one during its continuance. The law does not extend to this State. The fewness of the number of marriage registrations shows how little the Nayars, as a community, have availed themselves of it. The principal objections urged against it are: (1) that it ignores caste and customary restrictions on marriage and thereby interferes with caste; (2) that it sanctions what according to social usage is deemed to be incestuous marriage; (3) that marriage before the Registrar is obnoxious to the people, and that no one has any scruples about going through the customary form; (4) that the provisions relating to divorce are ill-adapted to the present state of society in Malabar, and that revelations of conjugal infidelity in public courts are the most repulsive to the people; (5) that the provisions relating to the giving of the whole of the self-acquired property to wives and children amount to violent interference with the customary law. The following extract from Moore's Malabar Law and Customs is well worth the perusal[2]:—

From the date on which the Act in Malabar came into force up to 31st March 1910, one hundred *sambandhams* have been registered. "In his last report of the working of the Act, the Registrar-General states, that the number of notices of

1. Logan's Manual of Malabar, Vol. I, page 136.
2. Malabar Marriage Commission Report, page 85.

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177 582 585 intentions to register *sambandhams* was thirty-six in 1896—97, twenty-four in 1897—98 and only fourteen in 1898—99." He accounts for the falling off as follows:—

> The mass of the people continues to regard the marriage law with aversion and suspicion, and even the educated members of the community who are in favour of the measure, shrink from taking advantage of it from fear of offending the elderly members of their *tarawads*, and all the powerful Nambuthiris and other great landlords. The Registrar of Calicut also points out, that the power conferred by the marriage law, to make provision for one's own wife and children, has hitherto acted as some inducement to persons to register their *sambandhams*, but as Act V of 1898 (Madras) which came into force from 2nd September 1898, enables the followers of the *marumakkathâyam* law to attain this object without registering their *sambandhams*, and "unnecessarily curtailing their liberty of action, and risking the chances of divorce proceedings," he thinks it unlikely that registration under the marriage law would increase in future.

595 Among the Nayars of ancient times in Cochin, Malabar and Travancore, there was polyandry. In the report of the Malabar Marriage Commission, it is said, that there is evidence to show that it still lingers in Ponnani and Walluvanad Taluks, especially on the Cochin border of the former Taluk.[1] Apart from its existence in former times, it may be said that nowhere in these States is the custom still found to linger, no admitted instance of it has come to my notice in the course of my investigations into the customs and manners of the castes in the various parts of the State. An account of these customs as it existed in ancient times, and the theories that have been advanced in respect of it are of some ethnographical importance, and it may not be out of place here.

Polyandry.

[593] [604] [582] [564] The Nayars of ancient times were, in most cases, neither regularly married, nor did they care much, when married, to support their wives and children; but their nephews (sons of sisters), who were their legitimate heirs, were properly looked after. Nayar women generally mated with Brahmans or Nayars, but never with people of lower caste under pain of death.

1. Malabar Marriage Commission Report, page 83.

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

fact contained all the rudiments of the State. There was the head-man with his assistants whose duties have been already mentioned. There were also the hereditary village servants (*cheria jenmakkárs*), the village Panchayets or *kúttams*, and the *Kavalai* system of police; and the village watchmen (*kávalkkárs*) with their grain fees, and sacred institutions, with their usual privileges. And finally there were independent Nayar chieftains with their private properties and usual sources of income and taxation.

The village life is simple, delightful, and charming, but it is gradually passing away under the influence of western civilization. It is therefore of some ethnographical interest to preserve an account of it at its period of transition.

The village education may first be taken for treatment. The old village school or pial school masters were called *Ezhuttachans* or *Asáns*, some of whom were maintained by the leading families on small monthly allowances and meals, while others owned schools and lived upon the income derived from the pupils thereof. The education of youths commenced at a very early period, for which an auspicious day, nay, an auspicious hour, generally the *Vijaya Desami* or *Vidyárambham* (beginning of the alphabet) day, the last day of *Desara* in the month of *Kanni* or *Thulám* (September-November) was chosen, when the local *Asán* or any fairly educated man was invited to give the boy his first lesson. In a conspicuous part of the building a bell-metal vessel was placed. On this was spread a thin layer of rice, and on each side of the vessel was placed a bag of rice and paddy, while a lighted lamp was also placed beside it. In front of these sat the infant scholar three or five years of age. The *Asán* or the teacher wrote on the boy's tongue with a gold coin (fanam) the divine invocation *Hari Sree Gana Pate Ye Namah* (Salutation be to Vishnu, Saraswati and Ganapati). The initiation was completed by the teacher holding the boy's ring finger and tracing the letters of the alphabet in the rice in the vessel. The ceremony would then come to an end with a feast to the inmates of the house as well as to friends and relations. After this, he was placed under a teacher who taught him along with others to write the letters of the alphabet on sand. This would go on for a month or two until the

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
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Nayar

291 is no covering for the head. This forms the costume of a [292] large majority of them. On special occasions or when he goes to public places, he has the same loin cloth, while a richer cloth (*pivu mundu*), somewhat longer and broader, is worn over [464] the upper part of the body. As has already been said, Nayars [177] are to be found in all grades of public service, and these as well as others wear a kind of a neat loin cloth, with a shirt and coat together with a turban to cover the head, while others more fashionable appear in European costume with turbans instead of hats; others again wear hats as well, but their number is few. Among the poorer classes, the loin cloth is not larger than a yard-and-a-half or two by three-fourth of a yard.

382 The men shave their faces and bodies clean, leaving an oval patch of hair on the top of the head, while some grow it over a large surface of the head. In both cases, care is taken to keep the tufts sufficiently long, smooth and oily, and this [177] adds considerably to their neat and handsome appearance; but it is becoming the fashion to crop the hair and to dress it in the fashion of the Europeans.

291 The Nayar women wear an inner garment round the loins and this is covered by an outer garment which is usually two-and-a-half yards in length and one-and-a-half yards in breadth. Sometimes, instead of two cloths, one cloth sufficiently long for the purpose is worn. The dress is white, and sufficiently decent to cover the lower part of the body, and a small upper cloth serves as a covering above the waist. The Nayar women of the present day wear petticoats and cover the upper part of their body [369] with a piece of cloth. It is curious to notice that this form of [178] dress does not find favour (in the rural parts) with the Nambuthiris who are either their landlords or to whom they owe some kind of allegiance or subordination. The absence of any covering for the bosom in ordinary female dress has drawn much ridicule on the Nayars, and this custom has been much [548] misunderstood by foreigners. So far from indicating immodesty, it is looked upon by the people themselves in exactly the opposite light, for among them prostitutes only cover the breasts. "A custom has in it nothing indecent when it is universal," as [71] one of the travellers philosophically remarks (Dall). It is, in [576] fact, a mark of disrespect to one's own elders and betters for either a male or female of the Nayar caste, and of all castes

11: India G-4, 5 (1960-1961) 1962 AWll Kerala AWll

5.5 The average annual landing of marine (coastal) fish is estimated at 260,000 tons (35% of the all-India output) and the gross value of marine catches at Rs. 6.5 crores.

5.6 The catches from coastal waters comprise such commercially important species of fish as Sardines (20%), Prawns (13%), Mackerel (11%), Sharks (5%), Silverbellies (4%), Horse Mackerel (4%), Sole (3%) and Ribbon fish (3%). According to a sample survey conducted by the ICAR in Travancore-Cochin area, about 61 per cent of the total landings are consumed in fresh condition and the remaining part is utilized in various fish-based industries. (An alternative estimate by the State Fisheries Department puts the ratio as fifty-fifty.)

5.7 Dug-out, plank-built canoes and catamarans are the main types of crafts employed for fishing. Dug-out canoes are more popular throughout the State. Boat seines, gill nets, lines and hooks, coast nets and shore seines are the important tackle used in Kerala. Drift nets are used for catching Sardines, Mackerels and Sharks while long lines are sometimes employed for exploiting Horse Mackerels and Shark fisheries.

5.8 During the last decade efforts have been made to introduce mechanized fishing in order to raise the outturn and improve per capita income of the fishermen. Experiments for mechanizing indigenous boats and introducing suitable new types of mechanized crafts have been carried out in the State with the help of FAO experts and the Indo-Norwegian Project. However, unlike Maharashtra, Kerala has made very little progresss in mechanizing its fishing activity. This is mainly explained by the fact that the indigenous crafts in use in Kerala at present, have been found unsuitable for the installation of engines. Thus, to introduce mechanized boats, new boats have to be designed and constructed. As a result of a number of investigations and trials, a few small mechanized boats, ranging from 20 to 26 feet in length, have been recently introduced in the State. The Indo-Norwegian Project has so far issued 88 mechanized boats to the fishermen who completed training with the project. In addition to these, the State Fisheries Department has also issued 39 mechanized vessels. Of these, 25 have been issued to fishermen; of the rest, some are operated by the Department at training centres for transportation of fish and some still remain idle.

5.9 In Kerala, as in some other marine States of India, mechanized boats are issued at subsidized rates to fishermen's cooperatives, groups of fishermen and to trainees who have been trained at one of the two Training Centres in the State. The quantum of subsidies is in line with the all-India pattern, that is, 50 per cent of the cost of engine, 25 per cent of the cost of hull and 33⅓ per cent on that of fishing nets and gears.[1]

5.10 The Indo-Norwegian Project is playing an important role in the development of fisheries in Kerala. The project aims at the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the fishermen. The programme envisages an increase in the production of fish as well as the earnings of the fishermen, improved handling and distribution of catches, the promotion of cooperative activities, and better sanitation and living conditions in the fishermen's villages. The project has also undertaken the supply of fish to the interior areas of the State. It provides most of the basic requirements of

[1] The Indo-Norwegian Project issued nets and gear on 80 per cent and hull and engine on 30 per cent subsidy in the beginning.

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ponderable evil, the reputation of which is great outside its boundaries.

5. POLYANDRY IN KERALA

During my stay in Kerala, I found that the following castes practise polyandry in the state: Nayars, Thandans, and Tiyas (Thiyyas) of north Cochin, Kammalans such as Tathans (goldsmiths), Karuwans, or Perinkollam (blacksmiths), Asaris (carpenters) and Puri-asaris (laterite-cutters), Musaris (bell-metal smiths of braziers); also the allied castes to these of Kolla-kurups (shampooers, masseurs, and leather-shield makers) and Vil-kurups(bow-makers), Tol-kollans (leather workers), Kanisans (astrologers), Mannans (washermen and barbers), Panans (exorcists and umbrella-makers), Pulluvans (herbalists and *nag* worship songsters). All follow *makkathayam* except the Nayars, who are *marumakkathayam* from one end of Kerala to the other.

Today, Nayars in Kerala are said, as we have seen (p. 92), to have ceased the practice of polyandry. Not only do they say so themselves, but other castes are emphatic on this point as well. Since, with the disappearance of the petty chieftains, Nayar militias no longer exist, the customs that were closely linked to these organizations have also faded away. The Mysore invasions perhaps had something to do with it, too, for Tipu Sultan was grimly determined to eradicate the Nayar armies and made this his principal objective. In 1788, before invading Malabar, in a proclamation which was intended, among other things, to be a warning to the people, he said: ". . . and since it is the practice with you for one woman to associate with ten men, and you leave your mothers and sisters unconstrained in their obscene practices, and are thence all born in adultery; and are more shameless in your connections than the beasts in the fields: I hereby require you to forsake these sinful practices and to be like the rest of mankind; and if you are disobedient to these commands, I have made repeated vows to honour the whole of you with Islam." (quoted by C. A. Innes, I.C.S. in *Malabar and Anjengo*, Madras District Gazeteers, p. 72). Many of the Moplas today, especially inland, are descendants of Nayars whom Tipu thus did "honour with Islam". They were forcibly circumcized and regaled with beef. Many, however, reconverted themselves later, but lost caste in the process and were never considered the same again.

In spite of it being said that Nayars are no longer polyandrous in Kerala, I was able to find, as I shall show further on, some families left

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949)1963 AWll Kerala AWll
Thandans

were definitely separated from each other, but they were already themselves shy in each other's presence, and tended to keep apart. I was surprised to hear the informant mention so long a period of latency, beginning too so early, but of course, what she said should not be taken too literally, there being a strong possibility that she was either mistaken or that she was giving me the information which she thought I would like to hear. She was also the sole source of what I learned in these matters, and I did not have an opportunity to check up on what I heard with any other woman. Still, I find what she told me to be worth mentioning, because it may be that, after all, children in Kerala do have a relatively longer period of latency than was to be expected in such a community. 864

I enquired about pre-nuptial sexual relations, but the informants, Nani and Panju, assured me that no such things existed. On the contraty, they said, virginity was very highly praised, not only in a girl but also in a boy. Here again, I have my doubts as to the accuracy of this reply, suspecting a knowledge of European ideals in such matters, especially those of the Victorian era. Since much that is British in India today still reflects this period, this may have influenced them to give me such an answer. It was added, however, that other, higher castes, such as Nayars, had no such prejudices, and because of this I have wondered if the information did not take the form that it did out of a desire to praise Thandans and show them up in a favourable light in comparison with Nayars. It was probably a combination of both that prompted them to take this attitude: they wanted to make out that their caste conformed to European standards in what concerned pre-marital sexual relations and was therefore superior to that of the Nayars, their immediate rivals. 836 194 564 [177]

I enquired privately, one day, what was the position adopted in coitus by this community. I was told that, contrary to what happened in higher castes where the man lay below the woman, with Thandans the man was always above. The contrary "was not favourable to the procreation of warriors", a strange remark I thought, considering that it was the Nayars who, in olden days, constituted the martial class. I had already heard about this particular way in which some castes in Malabar were reputed to have sexual intercourse, when I was working with the Todas in the Nilgiris during the summer of 1949. I will be giving an account of it in the chapter about these people. 833 564

The only point which my interpreter was willing to concede to the higher castes was that they were less inclined to homosexuality than the 838 564 177

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Thandans. With the latter, a lot of men were known for their proclivities of this sort, and they were nearly as bad as the Moplas, I was told. The latter were very much addicted to sodomy, but then it was part of their culture, and had been acquired with Islam from the Arabs.

There was no impotence or frigidity in Kerala, not with any caste, I heard. People were far from "cold" and passion, rather, was the rule. I was given a long description of the consummate art with which the higher castes indulged in amorous pleasures and assured that the lower castes had only learned from them. It seemed, however, that the Thandans could never hope to excel in these matters, especially the women who were still far from being the "angels" which those of their superiors undoubtedly were.

Asked about crime, neurosis, and insanity, my interpreters said that, to their knowledge, there was little of these in the area. As only recently, since my arrival in Shoranur, a Thandan woman had assassinated her husband, I remarked on the circumstance and asked them how they reconciled it to their statement. They replied that it was an exceptional event, and that for a long time previously, nothing of the sort had happened. People, on the whole, were docile and not aggressive. They did not even indulge in poisoning, which occurred quite frequently in other parts of the country. Again, insanity seemed to be restricted to the Moplas, who, apart from occasionally running amok as is well known, had members of their community frequently tied up in a mosque or to iron stakes, in the hope that they could thus be cured.

D. POLYANDRY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN KERALA

Unquestionably, polyandry no longer thrives as it did in Kerala and research into what changes have brought about this situation over the last two hundred years cannot fail to be of interest. I myself, having returned to the area after an absence of ten years, was able to notice many alterations, although these were not sufficient to warrant any specific consideration. Dr A. Aiyappan, Superintendent, Government Museum, Madras, has made a particular study of the Irava community, and in his publications on this subject, and on the more special aspect of polyandry in other castes of Malabar, has shown what factors are involved and how foreign contact has undermined the old culture and is bringing a new one into existence. Readers are referred to his books and articles listed in the Bibliography. I give here a brief outline of his

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949)1963 AWll Kerala AWll

conclusions, to which I may add those observations of mine in the field that appear to me to bear out his contentions most fully.

In 1792, after the defeat of Tipu Sultan of Mysore by the British, the latter took over the direct administration of Malabar. As we have seen, they began by farming out the collection of revenue to the local rajas; very soon, however, they found this system unsatisfactory and took over the task themselves. A corps of British administrators was formed and put in charge of the work; from then onwards, cultural conditions in Kerala underwent a very great change.

The term "Europeanism" has been used to cover all those aspects of Western foreign influence which have since then profoundly affected the local people's lives. This foreign influence has been followed since 1947 by recent reforms due to the policy of the present Congress Party Government of India, although these, too, have been inspired to a large extent by contact with the West. Today, a new force is making itself felt. Since the last elections in 1957, Kerala has been ruled by a government of the Communist Party, whose accession to power is, however, too recent for me to be able to give here any appreciation of the alterations it is seeking to impose on the State.

"Europeanism" includes many varied and subtle innovations in the everyday life of the inhabitants of Kerala, some of which can be put down as gains and some of which, on the contrary, must be considered as losses. Aiyappan has attempted to establish a balance sheet of these for the Irava community (to be found on p. 126 of his book *Iravas and Culture Change*). As far as the whole of the Kerala population is concerned, it can be said that the term mainly covers such principal items as the following.

First of all, the displacement of traditional rulers and their replacement by European officials. This took place throughout the area, and only the maharajas of Cochin and of Travancore were retained; later, a resident responsible to the Madras government was attached to them. The new officials were scant respecters of caste. While obliged, by force of circumstance, to take into consideration the innumerable compartments into which native society was divided and subdivided, they nevertheless were inspired, in their dealings with the people and in their choice of assistants, by the Christian ideals of equality and individual merit, whereby they brought about a revolution in traditional methods of government. Only Islam, with the arrival of the Arab traders on the Malabar coast nearly one thousand years before, can be said to have brought anything similar to bear on the static outlook of the people;

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949) 1985 Awl

but then this influence made itself felt rather by conversions and personal dealings than by any direct, government action, as now.

Transport, which in Kerala had always been difficult, was also greatly changed. Modern facilities, such as good roads, ferries, bridges; later, motor cars, railways, engine-driven ships, boats and launches; and finally, aeroplanes, have put thousands of boatmen and cartmen out of work and have not only brought formerly isolated and inaccessible parts of the country into contact with the rest, but have also made important centres become within easy and rapid reach of each other. As in other parts of the world where it is impossible for race distinctions to be observed in a system of general transport, caste is overlooked in public transport in Kerala, and this fact has greatly contributed to breaking down traditional socio-religious pre-occupations in such matters.

With the institution of a regular method of dispensing justice through courts, caste was dealt a further blow; the European masters of India refused to treat individuals otherwise than as equals before the law. The judiciary personnel was recruited from all sections of the population, regardless of caste or creed. This measure, together with the new way in which government servants were enlisted, gave the more enlightened castes of Nayars and Tiyas their chance. The present eminence in public affairs which these two communities have attained is in a large measure due to the opportunities thus thrown open to them.

Education, of course, also had a lot to do with it. Instead of the old kind in which village teachers taught native lore and traditions in an unchanging, ageless fashion, European-type schools were opened and modern means of education became available to all who wished to take advantage of them. These methods may be criticised today, since independance in 1947, as being un-Indian and useless in the context of the national culture, but the fact remains that they brought great changes in the outlook of the people, especially among the middle classes, who have indisputably benefitted from them.

Liberal, learned professions began to be followed by many to whom such careers were not open before, and again, regardless of caste distinctions, lawyers, doctors and teachers appeared in large numbers in Kerala. Many of them soon travelled to other parts of India, where their reputation as able and knowledgeable practitioners has never ceased to grow. A large part of the Government of India's New Delhi office personnel is made up of men from Kerala, in both high and subordinate positions, especially Nayars, so much so, indeed, that the fact has become the subject of a standing joke.

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949)1963 AWll Kerala AWll

"Europeanism" further enhanced its influence in Malabar with the introduction of new industries and capitalistic enterprise. The coconut, cashew nut and coir industries employ thousands today and have created amongst the people an even greater dependence on the fluctuations of world prices than in the days of the pepper trade. Weaving, tile factories (such as the one founded by the Basel Mission), saw-mills, match factories and metal industries have given many people a new outlook on life which they could never have had in the old days, and has profoundly changed their traditional concepts. Prohibition introduced by the Congress Party Government, with its consequent forbidding of the ancient profession of toddy tapping, has thrown many Tiyas out of work, obliging them to seek their livelihood elsewhere, and modifying for this reason the traditional structure of their economy and family life.

Greater and better medical facilities, as well as a growth in industrial productivity, have brought about a correspondingly sharp rise in the population, so much so, indeed, that today Kerala ranks first in density to the square mile out of the whole of India. Agricultural prosperity has unfortunately not kept pace with this advance, making it often difficult for everyone to obtain food, especially when the monsoon fails, as it often does in the latter part of the year. Foodstuffs, especially grain, have thus to be imported from outside, and when this is not sufficient, many seek work in other parts of the world, leaving their families for years at a time, to emigrate and hire themselves out as labourers in Ceylon, Singapore, and the Malay Federation.

It is not surprising, under the circumstances, that the old order in Kerala has crumbled. Of the rajas and maharajas of old, none are any longer in positions of responsibility, those of Cochin and Travancore having also been made destitute by the recent re-arrangement of States in India. The Nambudri Brahmins are, perhaps, those who, because of their priestly character, continue more than anyone else, to lead the ancient, traditional life. Many of them, however, have gone in for the new enterprises, and if they do not always themselves own and direct them, they have invested funds in them. The younger members of the *illams* appear to be increasingly dissatisfied with their lot, and do not seem prepared to accept the old imperatives of occupation and succession. It may not, after all be just a coincidence that the Communist Party Government now in power in Kerala is headed by a Nambudri Brahmin.

The Nayar caste is no doubt the one that has been the hardest hit by the sweeping changes brought about by altered conditions. But its

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949) 1963 AWll Kerala AWll

members have been the ablest of all in adapting themselves and in taking advantage of the new opportunities which the Europeans brought. To them have gone the best and most rewarding jobs both in and out of the administration, positions of trust and responsibility to which their long training as soldiers and managers of the upper castes in Kerala had possibly prepared them. I was astonished to find how many well-known names in present-day India still have their homes and families in Ottappalam of the Walluvanad taluk.

It has already been said how very much the Tiyas, everywhere in Kerala, have progressed, and how they, too, have taken enormous advantage of changed circumstances, especially education, to become today one of the most progressive communities in the State. Aiyappan's book is witness to this. Perhaps only the lower castes, such as Kammalans, other artisans, Cherumas, Pulayas, aboriginals and the poorer section of the Mopla Islamic community, have remained as they always were, and have shown no signs of taking advantage of the benefits brought in by foreign rule. It is not to be excluded, however, that it may be precisely for them that the new Communist government will legislate, especially for the landless agricultural labourers – but it is too early to say anything about this yet.[1]

Following closely upon the replacement of the old order by a new one, polyandry, too, has crumbled in Kerala. The Nayars, whose non-fraternal polyandrous customs so forcibly struck the early Portuguese and other European travellers, have ceased to practise polyandry, at least in the pristine form in which it was described by the ancient writers. Since this polyandry appears to have been closely correlated with the military organization of the Sudra militiamen of the local rajas and chieftains, it was perhaps to be expected that, when the latter disappeared, the custom of non-fraternal polyandrous marriage went with it. Particularly as men living in a *marumakkathayam* system of inheritance seem to suffer greatly from the fact that they can leave nothing to their children, but only to those of their sisters. In a conversation that I had with His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin, at Ernakulam on the 18th of April, 1949, he told me that it was "un-natural" for a man not to be able to provide for his own children, and that, in his opinion, the custom could not survive much longer for this reason.

[1] A step has been taken in this direction with *The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill 1957* which introduces comprehensive land reforms, including the right of "permanent tenants" to purchase land held by them, a ceiling on land holdings and fixation of fair rents.

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There appears to be no doubt that Thandans and Tiyas (Thiyyas) of the central area are gradually giving up polyandry. Others have reported on the speed with which it is disappearing, sometimes exaggerating the rapidity, it seems to me, but nevertheless correctly stating that not many more years will pass before the custom has become simply a memory, as it is with the Nayars. I think a distinction should be made, however, between the more wealthy, upper members of the caste and the lower, poorer ones. In fact, polyandry with the Thandans and Tiyas is being abandoned from the top, and this observation is valid not only for their community, but also for polyandry in general in Kerala.

It is the upper castes, who have had greater opportunity to educate themselves, adapt themselves to higher standards and lead a more modern, Europeanized type of life, who are giving it up as something primitive and unworthy of self-respecting citizens. Within the castes, however, it is not always the upper strata that has progressed in this way, as can be seen with the Nayars, where polyandry is reputed to be practised still in the conservative court circles of Cochin and Travancore. Among the Thandans and Tiyans it is the other way round, the upper class either professes not to follow the custom any longer or really abstains from doing so. The Kammalans and associated artisans nearly all continue to be polyandrous, and as they are without exception people of very slender means, a distinction such as the one made here does not apply.

Aiyappan, discussing new trends in the Irava community, has written: "Differences in occupations and income and the development of new sexual standards are two active forces that one sees in operation against polyandry." (*Iravas and Culture Change*, p. 103.) Iravas, according to him, had formerly very few avocations from which to choose. They pooled their resources and worked for the house, their common wife and their children, without making any individual reservations. Today, matters have changed and the men each want a different type of work, chosen from among the numerous new occupations which are open to them, and aspire to have their own family, wife and children. The old ways are no longer fashionable, and are even despised and considered to be primitive and barbarous. Jealousy thus reappears, and asserts itself in no uncertain way. The women, too, do not want to be shared any longer by a number of brothers, and prefer to return home or refuse polyandrous marriages rather than be joined in wedlock in the traditional manner. In North Cochin, however, it was the progress of the people in higher levels of the Thiyya caste that brought about a legal inter-

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diction of polyandry. (For a synopsis of the Act of 1940, see p. 238 ff.)

While travelling round with my guides and interpreters in 1949, I had ample opportunity to hear what the polyandrous families were thinking about the ancient form of matrimony which was beginning to be despised. Here are some of the remarks which were made to me in the course of my interviews:

Raman, the informant of the Appayl Wattakkeh household, said that if only twenty five per cent of two hundred and fifty Thandan families in the Walluvanad taluk still practised polyandry today, it was because the Moplas, Nayars and Brahmins ridiculed the practice as low-caste and primitive. The Thandans wanted to reform themselves and aspired to higher things, therefore they had to give up polyandry as representing something backward.

Velu, informant of the Kereghetil household of the Katukulangara *tarawad*, told me that as long as the property was undivided, they practised polyandry, as it kept them from having many wives in whose quarrels they might become involved and thus break with each other. But now, as each man wanted to go his way, things were different, and polyandry was no longer possible.

It will be remembered that, on the 2nd of November, 1949, I attempted to visit a rich Tiya household near Kunnamkulam in north Cochin, only to be put off by an old man, accompanied by a younger one, who assured me that no one was polyandrous in their family any more. When I went on to a poor labourer's house nearby, I was told that this was not true. There were three brothers in the older generation (one of whom was the elder of the two men to whom we had spoken) and they lived in polyandry, although, being wealthy, they did not like to admit it.

In the Kaladiwalapil household, that of the miserable Tiya labourers next door, in the village of Perumpillav, the informant, Raman, said that the ancient custom by which brothers shared a common wife, and thus avoided the quarrelling among sisters-in-law in which they feared to become embroiled, was changing now because the younger people found it "more convenient" to be monogamous. When I asked him what he meant exactly by this phrase, he replied that "times have changed" and that it is "easier" thus. Not yet satisfied, I insisted on more clarification, whereupon I heard that polyandry is "not done any longer", that it was "out of fashion", and not "modern". Raman was unable to express himself better, and seemed plainly puzzled and embarrassed by my request for a more precise explanation.

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I obtained the same kind of answer from Panju of the Appayl Wattakkeh household, it will be recalled, when I asked him how it was that his maternal uncle consented to get a new wife for him and his brother, Narayana, when they refused to live any longer in polyandry with Raman and Kuniyama. He said that his mother's brother had certainly begun by resisting the request, but that, in the end, he had given in because "times have changed" and he could not very well force them to remain in their present marriage if they said that they were dissatisfied with it.

It was Panju, too, who gave me the unexpected information that it was "immorality" that was breaking up polyandrous households. Women were not at all chaste any longer, he said, and anybody could have them "for a song". So every man now wanted a wife of his own whom he could control, instead of submitting himself to the old discipline and consenting to remain without complaint in the old polyandrous type of union.

My experience with Kammalans and other artisan castes was different. Polyandry with them is also threatened, but it cannot be said that it has deteriorated to the same extent with them as it has with the higher castes. Jealousy, however, seems to be coming very much to the surface, and I heard many tales of serious quarrelling among the men, leading to separation and to division into splinter households.

Raman, the *Asari* informant of the Perinkulam household, interviewed at Palappuram, said that polyandry was dying out because "Civilization is spreading". When I asked him what he meant by "civilization", he answered, rather simply, that people did not tie up their hair any longer in the typical Malayalam way, a top knot in front over the forehead, and that many had taken to growing moustaches. He added, however, to these very personal criteria of his, that women refused now to be wedded to many men; some wealthier people, he revealed, even go so far as to insert a clause into the marriage contract by which it is stipulated that their daughter will not be given in marriage to more than one man. He concluded by sighing, shrugging his shoulders and exclaiming that it was not right, but what could be done about it?

Kunji, the daughter of old Kurumba of the *Tolkolan* Palakaparampil household near Meitenadeshan, also complained of too much quarrelling among the men of a polyandrous family, and said that because of this, the women did not want to be married in this way any longer. She attributed to these reasons the fact that her household had already given up polyandry in the previous generation.

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Because of the profound cultural changes which have fundamentally modified the social and economic structure of Kerala society, it can be said that polyandry is on the decline in that part of the world. Circumstances no longer favour the marriage of many men to one woman, and the custom is not only being abandoned as useless, but those who, by tradition, should follow it, look upon it with abhorrence and with growing disgust. To those who have practised it so long, as something good and moral, it has become, nowadays, something barbarous, primitive an unworthy of them: times have changed and it simply is not done any longer.

ADDENDUM

Act XVII of 1115, the Cochin Makkathayam Thiyya Act, passed by His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin on the 18th day of Kumbham 1115, corresponding to the 1st day of March 1940.

C.V. Iyyu, former Member of the legislative Assembly of Cochin State, told me on the 27th of October, 1949, that he was on the Commission which in 1937-38 drafted the Cochin *Makkathayam* Thiyya Act of 1940. The majority of the members of the Commission were Tiyas (Thiyyas) and the initiative of the enactment was due to V. K. Krishnan Kutti, M.L.A., *wakil* of Trichur, himself a Tiya. The Act is thus a Tiya legislative reform and not a foreign one. This would explain the fact that it is observed. I hear that the idea is a result of the education and progress of the Tiya community, which now ranks as one of the most accomplished in Kerala.

Some of the main provisions of the Act are given here below. They are those that concern definition of the name Thiyya, of an heir's sex in doubtful cases, acceptable forms of the marriage solemnity, prohibition of polyandry (art. 12), succession both testamentary and intestate:

Chapter I. Five articles.

Art. 5, (i): "Thiyya includes Ezhuva, Chova, Billava, Marayan, Thandan and others recognized as such." It adds: "When owing to any physical defect or deformity, it is not possible to ascertain the sex of any of the heirs of an intestate, such heirs shall, for the purpose of this Act, be regarded as female."

Chapter II. Marriage and its Dissolution. Thirteen articles.

Art. 6: "Conjugal union may be openly solemnized in any of the following ways:

a) by the tying of the Mangalya Sutram
b) by the presentation of cloth to the female by the male
c) by exchange of rings
d) by mutual garlanding, and

595 As to the present existence or non-existence of polyandry I must call recent writers into the witness-box. The Rev. S. Mateer, Mr. Fawcett writes,* "informed me ten years ago—he was speaking of polyandry among the Nâyars of Travancore—that he had 'known an instance of six brothers keeping two women, four husbands to one, and two to the other. In a case where two brothers [197] cohabited with one woman, and one was converted to [177] Christianity, the other brother was indignant at the Christian's refusal to live any longer in this condition.' I have not known an admitted instance of polyandry amongst the Nâyars of Malabar at the present day, but there is no doubt that, if it does not exist now (and I think it does here and there), it certainly did not long [564] ago." Mr. Gopal Panikkar says † that "to enforce this social edict upon the Nairs, the Brâhmans made use of the powerful weapon of their aristocratic ascendancy in the country, and the Nairs readily submitted to the Brâhman supremacy. Thus it came about that the custom of concubinage, so freely indulged in by the Brâhmans with Nair women, obtained such firm hold upon the country that it has only been strengthened by the lapse of time. At the present day there are families, especially in the interior of the district, who look upon it as an honour to be thus united with Brâhmans. But a [178] reaction has begun to take place against this feeling, and Brâhman alliances are invariably looked down upon in respectable Nair tarwads. This reactionary feeling took shape in the Malabar Marriage Act." Mr. Justice K. Narayana Marar says: "There is nothing strange or to be ashamed of in the fact that the Nâyars were originally of a stock that practiced polyandry, nor if the

* *Op cit.* † Malabar and its Folk, 1900.

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In a recent account of a Nâyar wedding in high life in Travancore, the host is said to have distributed flowers, attar, etc., to all his Hindu guests, while the European, Eurasian, and other Christian guests, partook of cake and wine, and other refreshments, in a separate tent. The Chief Secretary to Government proposed the toast of the bride and bridegroom.

The following note on Nâyar pregnancy ceremonies was supplied to Mr. Fawcett by Mr. U. Balakrishnan Nâyar. "A woman has to observe certain ceremonies during pregnancy. First, during and after the seventh month, she (at least among the well-to-do classes) bathes, and worships in the temple every morning, and eats before her morning meal a small quantity of butter, over which mantrams (consecrated formulæ) have been said by the temple priest, or by Nambûtiris. This is generally done till delivery. Another, and even more important ceremony, is the puli-kuti (drinking tamarind juice). This is an indispensable ceremony, performed by rich and poor alike, on a particular day in the ninth month. The day and hour are fixed by the local astrologer. The ceremony begins with the planting of a twig of the ampasham tree on the morning of the day of the ceremony in the principal courtyard (natu-muttam) of the taravâd. At the appointed hour or muhûrtam, the pregnant woman, after having bathed, and properly attired, is conducted to a particular portion of the house (vatakini or northern wing), where she is seated, facing eastward. The ammayi, or uncle's wife, whose presence on the occasion is necessary, goes to the courtyard, and, plucking a few leaves of the planted twig, squeezes a few drops of its juice into a cup. This she hands over to the brother, if any, of the pregnant woman. It is necessary that the brother should wear a gold ring on his

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tamarind, and mango. The whole house is known as vitu. The houses are built on various models, such as pattayappura, nālukettu, ettukettu, and kuttikettu."

Concerning the dress of the Nāyars, Mr. N. Subramani Aiyar writes that "the males dress themselves in a mundu (cloth), a loose lower garment, and a towel. A neriyatu, or light cloth of fine texture with coloured border, is sometimes worn round the mundu on festive occasions. Coats and caps are recent introductions, but are eschewed by the orthodox as unnational. It is noted by Mr. Logan that 'the women clothe themselves in a single white cloth of fine texture, reaching from the waist to the knees, and occasionally, when abroad, they throw over the shoulder and bosom another similar cloth. But by custom the Nāyar women go uncovered from the waist. Upper garments indicate lower caste, or sometimes, by a strange reversal of Western notions, immodesty.' Edward Ives, who came to Anjengo about 1740, observes that 'the groves on each bank of the river are chiefly planted with cocoanut trees, and have been inhabited by men and women in almost a pure state of nature, for they go with their breasts and bellies entirely naked. This custom prevails universally throughout every caste from the poorest planter of rice to the daughter or consort of the king upon the throne.'"

[According to ancient custom, Nāyar women in Travancore used to remove their body-cloth in the presence of the Royal Family. But, since 1856, this custom has been abolished, by a proclamation during the reign of H.H. Vanchi Bala Rāma Varma Kulasakhara Perumal Bhagiodya Rāma Varma. In a critique on the Indian Census Report, 1901, Mr. J. D. Rees observes * that

* Nineteenth Century, 1904.

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chelakkamotiram, amatāli, arumpumani, and kumilatāli are fast vanishing. The kuttu-minnu is worn on the neck for the first time by a girl when her tāli-kettu is celebrated. This ornament is also called gnali. Prior to the tāli-kettu ceremony, the girls wear a kāsu or sovereign. The inseparable neck ornament of a Nāyar woman in modern days is the addiyal, to which a patakkam is attached. The only ornament for the ears is the takka or toda. After the lobes have been dilated at the karnavedha ceremony, and dilated, a big leaden ring is inserted in them. The nose ornament of women is called mukkuthi, from which is suspended a gold wire called gnattu. No ornament is worn in the right nostril. The wearing of gold bangles on the wrists has been long the fashion among South Indian Hindu females of almost all high castes. Round the waist Nāyar women wear chains of gold and silver, and, by the wealthy, gold belts called kachchapuram are worn. Anklets were not worn in former times, but at the present day the kolusu and padasaram of the Tamilians have been adopted. So, too, the time-honoured toda is sometimes set aside in favour of the Tamil kammal, an ornament of much smaller size. Canter Visscher (who was Chaplain at Cochin in the eighteenth century) must have been much struck by the expenditure of the Nāyar women on their dress, for he wrote* 'there is not one of any fortune who does not own as many as twenty or thirty chests full of robes made of silver and other valuable materials, for it would be a disgrace in their case to wear the same dress two or three days in succession'."

It is noted by Mr. Fawcett that "the Venetian sequin, which probably first found its way to Malabar in the days

* Letters from Malabar.

177 of Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque, is one of those coins
301 which, having found favour with a people, is used persistently in ornamentation long after it has passed out of currency. So fond are the Malayālis of the sequin that to this day there is quite a large trade in imitations of the coin for purposes of ornament. Such is the persistence of its use that the trade extends to brass and even copper imitation of the sequins. The former are often seen to
[554] bear the legend 'Made in Austria.' The Nāyars wear none but the gold sequins. The brass imitations are worn by the women of the inferior races. If one asks the ordinary Malayāli, say a Nāyar, what persons are represented on the sequin, one gets for answer that they are Rāma and Sīta; between them a cocoanut tree."

301 In connection with the wearing of charms by Nāyars
789 Mr. Fawcett writes as follows. "One individual (a
[777] Kiriattil Nāyar) wore two rings made of an amalgamation
[325] of gold and copper, called tambāk, on the ring finger of the right hand for good luck. Tambāk rings are lucky rings. It is a good thing to wash the face with the hand, on which is a tambāk ring. Another wore two rings of the pattern called trilōham (lit. metals) on the ring finger of each hand. Each of these was made during an eclipse.
301 Yet another wore a silver ring as a vow, which was to be
789 given up at the next festival at Kottiūr, a famous festival
782 in North Malabar. The right nostril of a Sūdra Nāyar was slit vertically as if for the insertion of a jewel. His
[304] mother miscarried in her first pregnancy, so, according to custom, he, the child of her second pregnancy, had his nose slit. Another wore a silver bangle. He had a wound in his arm which was long in healing, so he made a vow to the god at Tirupati (in the North Arcot district), that, if his arm was healed, he would give up the bangle at the Tirupati temple. He intended to send the bangle there by a messenger.

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bangle there by a messenger. An Akattu Charna Nāyar wore an amulet to keep off the spirit of a Brāhman who died by drowning. Another had a silver ring, on which a piece of a bristle from an elephant's tail was arranged."

Tattooing is said by Mr. Subramani Aiyar not to be favoured by North Travancore Nāyars, and to be only practiced by Nāyar women living to the south of Quilon. Certain accounts trace it to the invasion of Travancore by a Moghul Sirdar in 1680 A.D. In modern times it has become rare. The operation is performed by women of the Odda or Kurava caste before a girl reaches the twelfth year.

Concerning the religious worship of the Nāyars, Mr. Subramani Aiyar writes that "Buchanan notes that the proper deity of the Nāyars is Vishnu, though they wear the mark of Siva on their foreheads. By this is merely meant that they pay equal reverence to both Siva and Vishnu, being Smartas converted to the tenets of Saṅkaracharya. Besides worshipping the higher Hindu deities, the Nāyars also manifest their adoration for several minor ones, such as Mātan, Utayam, Yakshi, Chattan, Chantakarnan, Murti, Maruta, and Arukula. Most of these have granite representations, or at least such emblems as a sword or a cane, and are provided with a local habitation. Besides these, persons who have met with accidental death, and girls who have died before their tāli-tying ceremony, are specially worshipped under the designations of Kazhichchavu and Kannichchavu. Magicians are held in some fear, and talismanic amulets are attached to the waist by members of both sexes. Kuttichattan, the mischievous imp of Malabar, is supposed to cause much misery. Various spirits are worshipped on the Tiruvonam day in the month of Avani (August-September), on the Uchcharam or 28th